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They Taught Us To Read

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Part 1 of two installments on home economics in Africa

They Taught Us To Read

I wouldn't be here today if
our parents hadn't been so fussy!

by Amelia Caulker

Home Management Special Student

How I think of home today! Home—warm climate, heavy rains, gorgeous sunset and moonlight, the mountains, the sea, the folks—Sierra Leone.

My little country, so different from great America, and yet so basically alike, is one of the pink countries on the rear underside of west coast Africa—pink because it is a British possession. Twenty-eight thousand square miles in area, my country is populated by 2½ million people representing 13 different tribes and 13 different languages. No wonder English and Broken English have made an enviable place for themselves.

I belong to the Sherbro tribe and I speak the lan-

guage as well as I speak Mende and Broken English. My home is a tiny little village of not more than 50 houses in the southern province of the country.

In my childhood I was one of a family of nine, now seven. The nearest school, run by the Evangelical United Brethren Mission in Shenge, was several miles away. My father and mother had been educated there. But because traveling to the school had to be done on the river, and because my parents hated to see us leave home very early, they decided to teach us themselves.

My earliest recollection of reading English is from the Holy Bible, while sitting on a high chair next to Dad in our morning family prayers. Each person read a verse or two every morning, by order of age. Nobody had cause to dread saying a big difficult or new word, because you only had to start the first syllable haltingly, or else spell it out, and it was pronounced for you. We used the Sankey for our hymns, and with the help of a small organ, Father taught us many solos, duets, trios and quartettes in both English and Sherbro. The latter he had helped to translate from English himself. We studied from regular text books for the rest of our schooling.

Father was an independent trader in the village, and his customers, even the ones from neighboring villages, soon knew our program, and came to get their wants before or after our lessons. Oh the fun we had in general, as well as the hatred we had for lessons, especially since no other children in the village attended school. We often envied them their perfect freedom from what we felt was mere fussiness on the part of our parents. How I look back now at those years with gratitude!

In passing I must share with you one of the many jokes we had in connection with speaking English. One of my brothers suddenly came across a snake one day, and he called for help. My Dad took his gun out, but soon realized that in his haste he had come in too close a proximity to the snake to take a shot. In his realistic excitement he stamped his foot and shouted, "Go back, sir!" and the snake turned around and escaped for his life in great haste before he could be gotten at. That was a choice joke among us kids for a long time, as we said even the snakes in the bush had caught the contagion of understanding English.

When I finally left home at 10, I attended school for one year in Freetown, the capitol of Sierra Leone. The following year I went to boarding school at Harford, the Evangelical United Brethren Secondary School for Girls, in Moyamba, headquarters of the southern province.

The first American I had known was the Rev. G. J. Roselot, an American missionary at Shenge, who often

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Africa (Continued from page 11)

visited us and influenced our home life a lot for the good. He practically saved my life when I became critically ill one time and my folks took me to him because there was no hospital anywhere near. At school I met more Americans and studied English, music and other subjects. It was amusing how these Americans soon caught on to our trick of using our own language when we didn't want them to understand something.

The school program was very much like the British pattern. The fact, however, that it was run by Americans and up in the interior where there was no other high school for girls made it unique in ways. For that matter, Harford School girls are unique in many ways. Living in close quarters with the missionaries, it was easy for each of them to pass on knowledge in whatever was of particular interest to them. The result was that apart from regular school work, we held a high reputation for crocheting, knitting, tatting, sewing, and singing. Religion was a most stressed aspect of school life, and we spread our influence by going in small teams weekly to conduct religious services in the near-by villages where people were usually Moslem or Pagan.

The highlight of school life was graduation which only the American-run schools had in the accepted sense of the word. Perhaps the feeling is best expressed in the words of a verse of the school song which read:

"And when our course is ended,
And we leave this home so dear,
We'll make the world take notice
Of our challenge, "Look who's here!"

EDITOR'S NOTE: Amelia attended a two-year course in social science in England. Upon return to her own country she organized a program for local women helping them improve conditions in the home and village. This program has since spread and been re-organized on a national basis. Next month, the Homemaker will bring you the story of Amelia's experiences in social welfare work.

TIPS FOR GIFTS

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Hallmark (Continued from page 8)

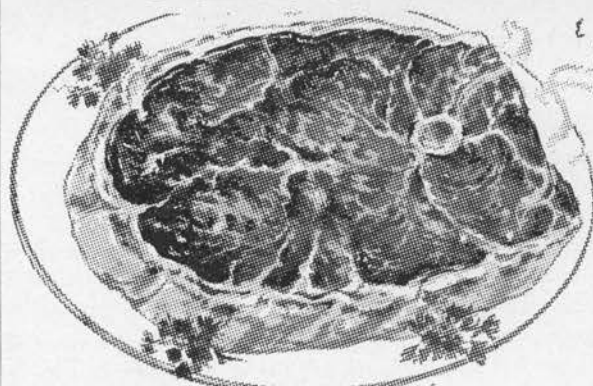


Bonnie Ferguson, H. Ec. '57, makes plates for each color on a card in the Finish Department.

through the use of radio and television, the greeting card industry sponsors such shows as the Hallmark Hall of Fame, in full color over the NBC-TV.

The Hallmark Card Company actually began in 1910 when Joyce C. Hall, president, first became interested in greeting cards. He worked with his two brothers, William and Rollie Hall, selling picture post cards, handling engraved Christmas cards and Valentines, and finally started manufacturing his own Hallmark Cards in 1913. After a fire which burned his plant to the ground, J. C. Hall obtained enough capital from friends who thought his business was on the road to success, and once again he ventured anew. By 1922 his staff had grown from 4 to 120, producing everyday greetings as well as special occasion cards. He enlarged the home office several times before 1936, and only last year, moved into the present eight-story ultra-modern plant adjacent to the 1936 headquarters.

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